

## Polity IV Country Report 2007: Colombia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">50</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	7	7	0	<b>Democ:</b>	7	7	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Durable:</b>	50			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			
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SCODE	<b>COL</b>	CCODE	<b>100</b>	Date of Report	<b>1 November 2008</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	6	2	3																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date			20 July 1957	Begin Date																					
				21 July 1957																					
<b>Polity Fragmentation: Yes, Interior Regions (c. 40%)</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	1991																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	President Alvaro Uribe Velez (Primero Colombia); initially directly elected May 2002; reelected 28 May 2006, 62.2%																								
<b>Legislature</b>	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>Chamber of Representatives (166 seats, 3 reserved for ethnic minorities, 1 reserved for Colombians abroad; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 12 March 2006)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Colombian Liberal Party (PLC): 36</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Colombian Conservative Party (PCC): 30</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Social Party of National Unity (PSUN): 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Party of Radical Change (PCR): 20</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Other parties: 48</p> <p>Senate of the Republic (102 seats, 2 reserved for indigenous; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 12 March 2006)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">PSUN: 20</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">PCC: 18</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">PLC: 18</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">PCR: 15</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Other parties: 29</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Indigenous Senators: 2</p>																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Constitutional Court; Supreme Court																								

## **Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>**

### **Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)**

In contrast to the authoritarian experiences of its South American neighbors, Colombia has a long history of electoral democracy. Led by the Conservative and Liberal parties, Colombia has been an institutionalized two-party system since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While Colombian democracy has often been restrictive in its design and violent in its conduct, nevertheless, the Colombian military has seized political power on only three occasions since the country's independence from Spain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most recent intervention of the armed forces occurred in the mid-1950s as a response to *La Violencia* (1948-58), the intense period of factional violence between the Liberal and Conservative parties that claimed over 200,000 lives. After a brief period of military rule (1953-57), in 1958 these two parties established a power-sharing agreement that severely limited electoral politics in Colombia for the next 16 years. Under this agreement, known as the National Front, the Liberal and Conservative parties alternated control of the presidency and shared equally in all legislative, judicial and administrative posts.

While the practice of sharing bureaucratic posts did not officially end until 1978, the National Front's formal restrictions on executive recruitment effectively ended with 1974 presidential elections. Since the dismantling (or *desmonte*) of the National Front over three decades ago, executive recruitment temporarily returned to its historical pattern of competitive electoral competition between Liberal and Conservative candidates. Amidst the backdrop of chronic political violence in Colombia, in 1998 Andres Pastrana won the presidency on behalf of the Social Conservative Party (PSC; former Conservative Party) ending the Liberals' 12-year control of the executive office in elections that were considered generally free, fair, and transparent. However, by the end of the 1990's it was becoming increasingly clear that the old political parties could no longer control the political agenda in Colombia. In the May 2002 presidential elections, a dissident member of the Liberal Party (PL), Alvaro Uribe Velez, standing as the candidate of the right-wing Colombia First Movement, defeated the PL's official candidate, Horacio Serpa Uribe, by a margin of 53.04% to 31.72%. For its part, the PSC had failed to even field a candidate of its own. The election was heavily disrupted by guerrilla activity in both urban and rural areas.

In October 2005, the Constitutional Court, overturning the single-term limit established in the constitution, ruled that President Alvaro Uribe could stand for a second term in 2006. According to President Uribe, he needed four more years to implement his peace plan for Columbia. In an overwhelming endorsement of the President's peace plan, in the May 2006 the voters of Columbia returned Uribe to power with over 62% of the popular vote.

### **Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)**

Colombia's Constitution provides for a separation of powers with significant legislative constraints on the executive branch. The 1991 Constitution removed the president's authority to appoint regional governors, created the elected office of vice president, limited presidential tenure to a single 4-year term, gave Congress veto powers over cabinet nominees and severely limited the scope of the president's state-of-emergency powers. As the head of the administration, the president is obliged to report to the Congress about the administration's activities. In March 2000, a conflict erupted between the executive and legislative branches on account of a corruption scandal that involved high-ranking legislators who were close to the President. The President responded with a reform package that included dissolving Congress and replacing it with a smaller legislature. But a strong opposition in the Congress responded with an intention to call new presidential elections and thus forced the President to withdraw his proposal and meet the oppositions' demands regarding replacements in the Cabinet.

While the Congress is a widely unpopular institution, nevertheless, its members continue to wield significant influence over Colombian politics. The clientelistic nature of politics in Colombia provides legislators with significant powers and, in many respects, has undermined any real effort to reform the political system. While the National Front formally ended in 1974, leaders of both parties have been reluctant to dismantle many of its basic tenets, which guaranteed both parties exclusive control over state largesse and power, in favor of a more plural and participatory regime.

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<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

The judiciary is inefficient, severely overburdened by a large case backlog, and undermined by intimidation from non-state actors (guerillas, paramilitaries, drug traffickers) and the prevailing climate of impunity.

**Political Participation: Factional Competition (7)**

Colombia's political system has long been defined by intense, and often violent, factionalism. Historically, the source of this factionalism revolved around the Liberal and Conservative parties. Underlying the conflict between these two parties were debates concerning the role of the Catholic Church in Colombian society and the desirability of federalism versus centralism in the organization of the body politic. However, the primary source of this factionalism stemmed from the patrimonial nature of party politics in this country and the competition for state largesse. The bitter rivalry between the Conservative and Liberal parties triggered the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), which claimed 100,000 lives, and *La Violencia* (1948-58) which produced over 200,000 casualties. While the power-sharing National Front agreement (1958-74) ameliorated the deep rifts between these two parties, the factional nature of politics in this country has not disappeared. Since 1974, both the Conservative and Liberal parties have worked together to stymie efforts to make the political system more transparent and open. Opposition voices outside the two dominant parties are subject to political harassment and intimidation by Colombian security forces (often in conjunction with both right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerrillas).

Since the 1960s, political competition in Colombia has been further aggravated by the political activities of left-wing guerillas, right-wing death squads, narco-terrorists and state security forces. Political competition between these groups has become increasingly violent since the late 1980s and has seriously weakened the political capacity of the central government. Endemic political violence, corruption and crime have all worked to undermine the authority of the central government in recent years. In the past 15 years over 200 bombs have been detonated in Colombia's major urban centers, an entire democratic leftist party was exterminated by right-wing death squads, and over 300,000 citizens (including four presidential candidates, 200 judges and investigators, half of the Supreme Court's justices, 1,000 police officers and 150 journalists) have been murdered in politically motivated violence. Over two million people have been internally displaced by this conflict.

Leftist-inspired rural insurgents have been a part of the political landscape in Colombia for over four decades. However, up until the early 1980s these guerrilla militaries, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), and terrorist organizations (most notably, the M-19) posed only a limited threat to the stability of the country. While the government was able to negotiate a peaceful resolution to their conflict with the M-19 organization in 1989, both the FARC and ELN have continued to wage war against the central government. While both the FARC and the ELN grew steadily in the 1990s, in recent years the military strength of both of these organizations has begun to wane. FARC, the largest of the two guerrilla groups, now only has 6,000-8,000 active fighters, down from 16,000 at the start of the decade. While the ELN has primarily used its military strength to extort money from the oil companies that operate in its core area in the north of the country, FARC has used its coercive capacity to fully entrench itself in Colombia's lucrative coca trade. In an effort to stem the tide of guerrilla power in Colombia, in the 1990s the government became increasingly tied to right-wing paramilitary groups whose primary objectives were to intimidate peasants who are suspected with sympathizing with these organizations and to protect pro-government drug traffickers from their guerrilla rivals. The vast majority of human rights abuses in Colombia can be attributed to these organizations, most notably, the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). In an attempt to bring a negotiated end to the government's conflict with these rebel groups, in 1998 President Pastrana created safe-havens for both the FARC and ELN. Over 42,000 square kilometers of Colombian territory were ceded to the FARC and some 5,000 to the ELN. However, despite this effort by the government to kick-start negotiations, little real progress has been made in ending these conflicts.

In March 2002 elections to the Senate a total of 38 minor parties secured 49 seats at the expense of the Social Conservative Party (PSC) of President Pastrana and the opposition Liberal Party (PL). Elections to the House of Representatives also left the balance of power in the hands of minor parties. The success of the minor political parties in the elections to both houses was attributed to the electorate's discontent with the failure of the peace process and to a widespread perception that politicians from both major parties were corrupt. The election was marred by a low turnout and a record number of blank or spoiled ballot papers. In August 2002, newly elected President Uribe decreed a 90-day state of national emergency under the provisions of the 1991 constitution. The declaration followed an audacious attack on the presidential palace

and other public buildings in central Bogota by members of FARC on the day of Uribe's inauguration. However, in April 2003, the Constitutional Court ruled that the imposition of the "state of internal commotion" was unconstitutional. The government vowed to introduce new anti-terrorism legislation, rather than seek a reinstatement of the state of emergency. Persistent rumors that link the government to the actions of right-wing paramilitary groups continue to plague the Uribe administration.

During 2005 President Uribe pursued a two-tracked strategy in which he sought to provide incentives for the right-wing paramilitaries to demobilize while simultaneously engaging the left-wing guerrillas in direct military action. In February 2005 President Uribe promoted a new law aimed at disarming the United Self-Defense Forces of Columbia (AUC). The AUC was formed in the 1980s by cattle ranchers and drug lords to combat the FARC and ELN rebels. By providing members of the AUC partial amnesty for past illegal activity (including drug trafficking) and co-opting them with monetary compensation, President Uribe has made significant gains in demobilizing the right-wing armed militia in recent years. By the end of 2007, over 30,000 AUC members had been disarmed. In addition to demobilizing the right-wing militias, President Uribe has continued to engage both FARC and ELN guerillas in both direct military action and peace negotiations. In July 2007, President Uribe freed 180 guerillas from jail. The FARC currently controls about 40% of the country's territory and holds over 4,000 Colombian citizens as political prisoners.